# The International Center for Intercultural Exchange ✣ Siena, Italy

## Community engagement through international service-learning: How a foreign student can become a functioning Social actor in the host society

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## Abstract

The International Center for Intercultural Exchange in Siena, Italy will present the results of a comparative study carried out on stud ents of its cultural immersion programs (service-learning/ community engagement program and academic program) to demonstrate the development of reflective intercultural competence, assessed through the use of the Biagi-Bracci RICA Model.


## Introduction

The history of Siena is marked by significant attention to the importance of service to others, and the role of third-sector organizations in providing such service. In the medieval period, Siena was an important stop on the Via Francigena, the pilgrimage route from Canterbury to Rome (and for some, on to Jerusalem).

Founded in this historical context, the International Center for Intercultural Exchange, composed of several distinct units that share a common mission and work towards promoting intercultural exchange, both in Italy, the U.S. and around the world, has created a set of education and cultural immersion programs for college and university students from non-Italian background. The faculty and staff of the International Center have designed the Full Immersion: Culture, Content and Service (FICCS) approach (Bracci & Filippone, 2010) which, paired with reflective education, is designed to give such students a much deeper engagement with and understanding of the many dimensions of Italian culture and language and lead to the development of Reflective Intercultural Competence, a term coined by Bracci & Filippone (2010).

## Method

The International Center for Intercultural Exchange hosts two types of programs: a Standard Academic Semester and a Service-Learning Program. The results of our study derive from the comparison of these two student groups.

A comparative study of 5 service-learning students and 5 Non service-learning students has been carried out in order to check our hypothesis that S-L students improve at a faster pace than Non S-L students their Reflective Intercultural Competence, that is a specific competence gained through a structured and guided reflection process that implies a conscious elaboration of intercultural encounters thus allowing a full engagement of the student who hopefully becomes a social actor in the host culture (C2).

Students' journals have been used for that purpose. Students' journals are a collection of weekly entries on the various aspects of their experience abroad to which they add their final reflections at the end of their sojourn.

The criteria used to choose journals are :

- Substantial Reflective content: less observations/descriptions and more reflection.
- Well structured journals: weekly reflective entries that allow us to trace student's RIC development that can reach 6 different levels.
- Student's permission.

In order to give a visual representation of the students' RIC development, we have chosen to create The RICA Graph which is a line graph that places on the X-axis the time variable measured in weeks and on the Y-axis the 6 RICA levels (Level 1: Pre-contact; Level 2: Contact; Level 3: Culture Shock; 4: Superficial Understanding; 5: Deep Understanding; 6: Social Acting ).

The path of each group of students visually represented by the different individual line graphs are analyzed and compared.

## Results

The results that we present in this research provide us with a first confirmation of the above given hypothesis.


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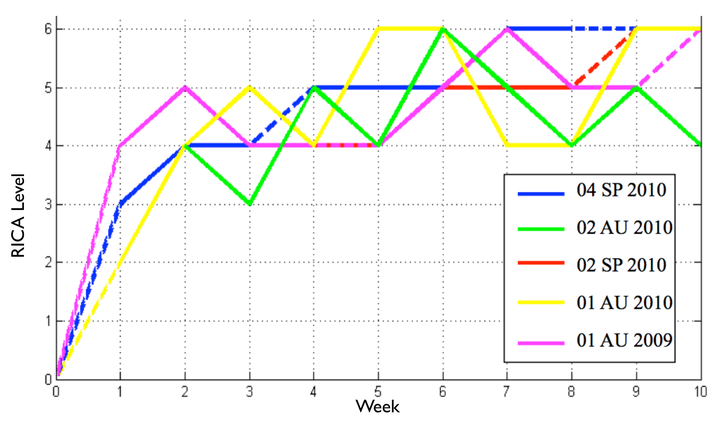
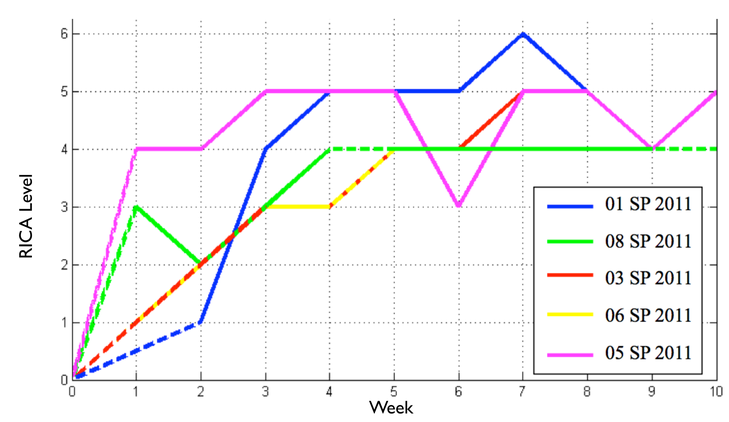
### RICA Graph S-L




### RICA Graph Non S-L




## Conclusions

This research is not about students with good or bad reflective intercultural competence but on the impact of service learning strategies on the development of reflective intercultural competence.

Given the results shown by the RICA graphs, we can say that they provide an initial confirmation of our hypothesis that Service Learning students reach level 6 and at a faster pace than Non-Service Learning students.